

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE



Enduring Questions
Institution: Wilbur Wright College



NATIONAL
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DIVISION OF EDUCATION
PROGRAMS

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National Endowment for the Humanities Division of Education Programs

Excerpt from a Successful Application

This excerpt from a grant application is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with staff members in the NEH Division of Education Programs well before a grant deadline. The excerpt does not include a budget or résumé.

Project Title: What is Freedom?

Institution: Wilbur Wright College

Project Director: Bruce Gans

Grant Program: Enduring Questions Course Grants

Narrative

This proposed Enduring Questions course will explore the question: What Is Freedom? The course's aim is to equip students to construct their own definition of freedom by providing exposure to, and help in grasping, the different answers conceived over the millennia in immortal works in philosophy, psychology, political science, religion and literature. The What Is Freedom? course will employ reading, discussion, writing and ancillary activities to engage students in such questions as; to what degree is freedom a function of the surrounding world---the form of government one lives under, the economic conditions, the values of the society and culture? To what degree is freedom a function of a person's own spiritual depth, character and values? Can a universal definition of freedom be formulated? Does a person's definition change throughout one's life? Is it possible to live in absolute freedom or is one only relatively free because of the limitations inherent in human nature and the constraints necessary for coexistence in any society? Can one live in freedom under a tyranny or slavishly in a democratic republic?

This particular What Is Freedom? course will have an unusually profound impact because its target audience consists of minority and nontraditional community college students, people who routinely enter college unexposed to sustained exposure to rigorous and central texts and who as a consequence are often in acute need of help in critical thinking, vocabulary building, reading proficiency and cultural literacy. This Enduring Questions: What is Freedom? course therefore will gain help in improving the practical skills listed above in the process of mastering texts they believed were beyond them. For the first time, many will experience the exhilaration and transformative effects of mediating on central questions.

The impact will be enhanced by being offered by a Project Director who has devoted his professional career to working with such students and specifically with complex books of lasting

importance. Widely read, the Project Director's qualifications include the establishment and leadership of a Great Books Curriculum on his home campus. In addition, with significant grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Secondary Education, the Project Director established and presently administers a National Great Books Curriculum Academic Community at www.greatbooks.com, to help other institutions start similar programs. He has also been a facilitator for creating four other Great Books Curricula on other campuses around the country, as well as a list of conference presentations concerning the practice of enabling inner city and nontraditional students to master rich central books.

The course readings will be presented in contrasting pairs that aims to most help students by enabling them to hear and participate in several sides of the question What Is Freedom? What follows then is the pairs of readings that will be assigned along with the reasons for this.

1. *Book of Exodus* and *Satyricon* by Petronius. *Exodus* discusses freedom as consisting of two components—abolition of a life in legalized slavery and the mastery of a disciplined religious faith with a carefully spelled out ethical code. *Exodus* argues that without sufficient spiritual evolution, one cannot inhabit a literal and symbolic “land of freedom.” *Satyricon* is a work unconcerned with political arrangements, and presents life being lived unconnected to any moral code apart from satisfying one's appetites. In short, a life roughly reminiscent of contemporary celebrity culture.
2. *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and the *U.S. Constitution*. *The Communist Manifesto* presents freedom in economic and political terms and sees it being absolute and utopian, future Communist societies being echoes of Garden of Eden and Second Coming myths. *The U.S Constitution*, by contrast, argues implicitly that only conditions of relative

freedom are possible because of man's potential for evil, for abusing power and the inevitable unequal distributions of talents and wealth.

3. *On Liberty* by J.S. Mill and *The Handbook* by Epictetus. *On Liberty* is arguably the definitive work on defining freedom as a liberal democracy and strictly limited government interference in private life and conduct. Epictetus by contrast rejects the idea that political conditions or cultural norms have any influence in the ability to live in freedom. Epictetus a slave and later a teacher, argues forcefully that individual freedom is a function of one's insights, one's values, and one's depth of character, principles and personal philosophy.
4. *Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois and *Up From Slavery* by Booker T. Washington. Du Bois argues powerfully, echoing Marx and Mill that human freedom is impossible in a society where people are enslaved, segregated, left unprotected by the rule of law and denied basic human rights. Booker Washington, like Epictetus a slave and later a teacher, while considering slavery antithetical to human freedom, argues with equal power, echoing Epictetus and Exodus, that the effects of a life under tyranny and injustice can be transcended and individual freedom can be achieved through the spiritual evolution and religious and ethical self development.
5. *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare's and *Bhagavad Gita*. Shakespeare examines the question of freedom among several social strata simultaneously. The definition he finally offers consists of self government, self knowledge, self control, adherence to the rule of law, the Christian virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation and the Aristotelian emphasis on moderation and the golden mean. The *Bhagavad Gita* on the other hand considers political arrangements and the direct involvement in life evident in all characters in *The Tempest*, irrelevant to a person's freedom. It instead advocates renunciation of the world and the

passions of the human psyche and a detachment that frees one from the effects of society and one's feelings and the events of one's life and urges a form of rational choice and premeditation similar to Epictetus.

6. Arthur Schopenhauer's *Wisdom of Life and Counsels* a large section from his *Parerga and Paralipomena* is lengthy and can be read without a pairing. This is perhaps the most concise, eloquent, clear and comprehensive discussion of the psychological and philosophical principles necessary to live a mentally harmonious and emotionally free life. It echoes the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita* and Marx's views on the destructiveness of alienated labor.
7. "Civilization and Its Discontents" and "Toward a Weltanschauung" by Sigmund Freud and *Labyrinths of Solitude* by Octavio Paz. Both works discuss man in his culture and the degree to which it is possible to live freely and what that means. Freud influenced by Schopenhauer, argues freedom is always relative due to the inherent limitations of the human psyche and the restraints necessary to live among others. Paz's, emphasis is freedom in terms of society and culture and is more sympathetic to Marx and the *Communist Manifesto*.
8. *Apology of Socrates* and "Letter from Birmingham Jail" The course ends with parallel cases from the ancient and modern world where both people are incarcerated and denied physical freedom. They both nevertheless radiate a transcendent, heroic inner freedom beyond that of most people living in legal freedom. Both men implicitly define freedom as being deeply involved in one's community while M.L. King in drawing parallels in his text between himself, Socrates and the Biblical prophets becomes a model for students of how a scholarly understanding of the struggle for and the definition of freedom gained through the study of immortal books, was essential to King's work.

The What Is Freedom course will be taught in a seminar setting. The course readings have been chosen to combine a complexity of ideas and book length works community college students can readily handle. Community college students read and learn most when graded on written study questions submitted the day a work is discussed. Hence the Project Director will as part of the course development design study questions that require textual analysis, interpretation and summary elucidation of the text's ideas. Class discussion and the four papers assigned during the semester will grow out of these questions and those students generate. The Project Director will conduct the classes as a moderator, elucidating textual allusions, while insuring all sides of the question considered are examined, and all participants contribute.

For the Project Director, an English professor, this What Is Freedom course offers several critical and unique intellectual, pedagogical and professional opportunities. The otherwise impossible opportunity to have funded for course preparation the time to read and ponder the rich and central secondary sources in the bibliography will have enrich one's pedagogy for years. Likewise unique and precious would be the opportunity to expand one's pedagogy into such areas as philosophy, political science and psychology "outside one's natural comfort zone." Because the creation of the Enduring Questions: What Is Freedom course would be unlike any taught at Wright, the opportunity to immerse students in examining a single central existential question for four months from the perspectives of many disciplines and eras ought to prove uniquely exhilarating and transformative for both students and professor.

Ancillary activities will include field trips to the most appropriate classical play or cultural event connected to the question of What Is Freedom. Course effectiveness will be assessed through grades, student written evaluations, and sample papers and discussions placed online at the National Great Books Curriculum Academic Community web site.

Enduring Questions: What Is Freedom?
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